1: Junod M-5 (1895-1909)1927 Thonga

E. THE LOBOLA CUSTOM.

1. *The History of the Custom. How it is practised.*

436 583 439 As far back as Natives can remember, lobola has always been practised. First it consisted of *mats* and *baskets*, in those remote times when white people had not yet made their appearance. *Large iron rings* were procured by barter from sailors who anchored off the shore (see Part IV), and were employed for the purpose. Later on white traders settled in the country. *Beads* were bought from them (nkarara), especially large ones (mubatlwana). A chief used to lobola with ten handfuls of these, a subject with only five. Large *brass rings* were also used in old times. Two of them have been found lately in the Maputju country, and one came into my possession. It weighs more than two pounds. They were called *litlatla* and were very much sought after. One was enough to buy a wife.

436 583 *Oxen* have also been used for a very long time for lobola. Some say that they were the regular means of getting a wife in the 18th century. When Manukosi came, in 1820, he appropriated all the cattle, and the Thongas were obliged to use beads and hoes for that reason. At any rate the Nkunas, when they emigrated into the Transvaal in 1835, were paying lobolo in oxen. A father claimed ten for his daughter. The Pedis of the country claimed only two or three, and this was one of the reasons why 436 the two tribes did not intermarry. Strange to say, I never heard 583 goats mentioned as having served for this purpose, though the 231 goat is certainly the oldest domestic animal of the South African Bantus! Whatever may have been the objects first used, sooner or later oxen, live stock, became the usual means of lobola. This appears plainly in the technical expressions : to go out with a herd (ntlhambi), viz., to go to lobola,—to eat the oxen, viz., to accept a lobolo,—the woman of my oxen, viz., the one bought with the oxen given by me for my wife, etc.

231 436 583 177 The scarcity of oxen, probably caused by the wars with the Zulus, was no doubt the reason why they were replaced by hoes. *Hoes* were universally employed from 1840-1870, together with oxen, when available. Ten was the regular price for lobola. Later on fathers asked twenty, thirty, fifty. They were first of native make ; the Vendas of Spelonken, near the Iron Mountain, provided the whole tribe for a time with that heavy currency, until the Europeans saw that there was good business to be done by supplying them. (See Part IV). Portuguese traders of Delagoa Bay began to send Natives to Gaza with guns and powder to hunt elephants, and paid them in hoes : twenty, fifty, one hundred hoes for a tusk, according to its size.

436 177 583 464 But hoes have also been superseded by the universal power of the *pound sterling*. After the death of Manukosi (1858), early in the sixties of the last century, some Zulus came to Delagoa Bay from Natal, sent by Englishmen to hunt elephants in Gaza. They told the people of the country that money could be obtained in Pietermaritzburg (Umgundhlovo) by working, and the first Ba-Ronga went *ku berengen*, viz., to serve white people there. In 1870, in the year still called Daiman by the chroniclers of the tribe, many more went to Kimberley, especially from the Transvaal colonies of Thongas, and gold coin began to spread amongst the tribe with all its usefulness and all its dangers. It is now becoming more and more current, as from 50,000 to 70,000 Natives of the Thonga tribe are working in the Johannesburg mines. First of all £ 1 was worth ten hoes, and the lobolo money was fixed at £ 8 by the chiefs. But this price was soon considered insufficient by the parents. They wanted £ 10.10.0, ten guineas! They had already learned that, amongst cultivated people and in refined transactions, we talk of guineas and not of pounds! Later on it rose as high as £ 20 for an ordinary girl, £ 30 for a chief's daughter. The average round Lourenço Marques was £ 18 at the beginning of this century and in the Transvaal £ 25 (1). When a

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(1) There is a tendancy constantly to increase the amount of the lobolo. Nowadays it is nearer £ 30 than £ 20. In this connection I may mention the following fact. A man named Mpunzi had payed £ 28 for his wife, and the matter was looked on as concluded ; but later on his parents-in-law came to claim £ 2 more. Why? They had purchased a wife for their son and had obtained her for £ 28 ; it was all right so

cut, dried and ground "ku djinga," as a foretaste! Then the other leaves are cut, covered with nkuhlu foliage and left for three days to mature (ku pfundja) ; a string is then passed through them and they are hung to a tree to dry. Before they have become brittle, they are rolled up together so as to form the "mfunge," a bunch of tobacco leaves which is sometimes three or four feet long by 4 to 6 inches thick. This bunch is exposed to the sun on the roof for one day. When the process of drying is finished, the leaves are put once more outside in the evening so as to get a little damp, and are then finally rolled up together. The bunch of tobacco is kept inside the house and often used for barter. 249 [436]

The *manioc* (ntjumbulu, mu-mi) is extensively cultivated both in the sand of the hills and near the marshes. The root, dried, and eaten either whole or ground, is very good food, but some plants have a bitter taste. But manioc can hardly be called a vegetable and borders on the domain of trees.

III. *Trees and fruits.*

Fruits play an important part in the diet of the Thongas. but wild fruits alone, the fruit with which Mother Earth presents them. They neither plant nor cultivate the trees ; when clearing the ground, they simply spare the fruit-bearing kinds which grow naturally. It may be that a man will sow some seeds of a particularly good *nkuhlu*, or *nkanye*, in his garden, if that garden happens to be devoid of trees : this is all they do to improve the quality of the fruit. It is no wonder, after all, that tree cultivation is almost entirely absent in Thonga agriculture : villages move so frequently, owing to contamination by death, accusations of witchcraft, or exhaustion of the soil, that nobody takes the trouble to plant trees which he will not be able to carry away with him to his new residence. 137 245

As regards the indigenous fruits, they are varied and numerous. Natives systematically spare every fruit tree when clearing their 222

316 Later on wrecked boats provided Native smiths with iron to make
325 hoes, axes, etc. In certain villages there were regular forges,
412 (Matlharin, near Mbengelen Island, Matjolo etc.). The hoes
436 were in the well-known form of an ace of spades and were fixed into a wooden handle, as are also the axes, and battle axes (I. p. 453). But the principal supply of iron came from the Transvaal Mountains, especially from the Northern Zoutpansberg, where the Bveshas have practised the art of mining iron ore for an unknown period. These Sutho hoes have played a great part in the history of the Thonga tribe, having been extensively used as currency for lobolo purposes.

325 These Bveshas — the word is said to be a Thonga corruption of Venda — built their furnaces in ant-hills, as shown in the accompanying illustration supplied by M. H. Gros, near Iron Mountain, East of the Speionken district. They excavated three holes under the furnace, and blew into them by means of bellows made of a skin, the air being expelled through an antelope horn. The ore, broken in small pieces and mixed with charcoal, was smelted, crushed, smelted a second time, crushed again and made into hoes and axes, etc. Who had taught the Vendas this art? Did they learn it from the Ma-Lemba, that curious tribe, half Semitic in its customs, which invaded the Northern Transvaal during the XVIIIth century? Nobody knows for certain. I am under the impression that this art is older than that, as the Lebombo Natives, who invaded the Nondwane in the XVIth century, seem to have possessed iron weapons. The origin of iron and the date of its introduction into South Africa is still a mystery.

326 Among the ornaments illustrated will be found a very pretty
177 belt (No. 1).[1] It is the work of a young man named Philemon, living in the outskirts of Lourenço Marques, who employed his leisure moments in making objects of this description with twisted wires of iron, brass and copper, bent in festoons and
[177] fastened with small tongues of metal. European influence is doubtless very marked in these belts, but still they possess a certain cachet of their own. Amongst the Zulus as in our tribe, large cups of various descriptions, including egg-cups, are

[1] [p. 101 -- Analyst]